

kite running—immortalized in Khaled Hosseini's best-selling novel *The Kite Runner*—which was responsible for one childhood episode he can't forget. He and Hasib were flying a kite from the roof of a Pakistani apartment complex when Inayat, then 7, fell four stories to a neighbor's paved patio. He broke an arm and a leg and was left with a permanent limp, but the accident made barely a dent in his passion for kite running. "We pulled him back up on the roof with his two casts on," Hasib recalls, laughing.

These days Inayat flies kites only occasionally, but the connection he feels to his native land is almost palpable. He lights up when he catches sight of two other Afghans from his old school: "*Wassup*, my country people?!" he shouts across the crowd. Yet seeing them, he says, reminds him of relatives still in Afghanistan and reinforces his sense of being a foreigner.

Nonetheless, he delights in all things American, listening to rap music, devouring Harry Potter books and immersing himself in U.S. history. He plans to one day study at the University of Illinois, where former Afghani neighbors live. None of his siblings has

made it to college yet, but Inayat—the first to go to a high school not specifically for ESL students—believes he will get a degree and be an entrepreneur like his father, Obaidullah, 49, a former filmmaker who now works in landscaping because of his limited English, or a professional like his mother, Zahida, 44, a former teacher who works in retail. (Relocated to the United States through the efforts of Catholic Community Services, both are legal residents with green cards.)

Zahida, who lost a pregnant sister to Taliban fighting, gushes with gratitude about the people and traditions of her adopted country. She stands firm that Inayat, like his siblings, will not date until he is out of his teens and old enough to marry. Though Zahida doesn't insist on traditional Afghani garb for her children, she abhors one style popular with many teen boys. "I don't like the pants hanging down," she says. "Not in this house."

Inayat, whose pants sit snugly on his waist, isn't likely to defy his role model. "My mom works really hard," he says. "She says, 'As much as you try, that's how much you're going to succeed in America.'"

THE STRUGGLE TO BE SLIM



Arielle Shepard, 17, checks out her profile in a mirror

It's lunch period at Dixon High School, in Holly Ridge, North Carolina, and Arielle Shepard, 17, nibbles cantaloupe as classmates wolf down burgers, fries and meat-pie pockets oozing melted cheese. "It's hard," says Ari of the tempting junk food around her. "It's not like the school couldn't offer something healthier."

Ari would know: The high school junior spent her sophomore year at the nation's first therapeutic boarding school for overweight teens. In nine months at Wellspring Academies, in Reedley, California, Ari lost roughly 115 pounds, shrinking from a size 26 to a size 14. "I'll never be an Abercrombie model," she says. "But I'm a whole lot thinner." **CONTINUED**

AN OBESITY EPIDEMIC

•16% of 6- to 19-year-olds are overweight—triple the proportion in 1980.

•43% of adolescents watch more than two hours of television each day, with additional time spent at computers and video games.

•Only 31% of parents of obese 12- to 17-year-olds are aware that their children are very overweight.

•71% of ninth graders take physical education, compared with nearly 40% of 12th graders.

•Being overweight increases a teen's chances of heart disease, hypertension, stroke, type 2 diabetes and depression.

Nearly 11 pounds at birth, Ari was always a big girl. At 8 she weighed 120; by 10 she topped 200. "We never ate meals together," says mom Terri, 38. "We made bad food choices and never exercised."

When Ari, who's 5-foot-8, passed the 300-pound mark at 15, her pediatrician, Charles Martin, grew so concerned he personally bought the teen a gym membership. He was especially worried about Ari's psychological health. And indeed, her weight began affecting every part of her life. She talked back to teachers and lost her temper in class. A talented softball player, she sat on the bench because she got winded easily and gave the coach attitude.

Alarmed by Ari's belligerence and misbehavior, Terri took her to see a therapist who, with Dr. Martin, researched residential weight-loss programs. When they told Terri, 38, about WellSpring's diet and exercise-based curriculum, she was enthusiastic. Terri herself had a history of obesity and had undergone gastric bypass surgery six years earlier when she weighed 397 pounds. She lost 150 pounds in six months but had a difficult recovery that left her intolerant of certain

foods and prone to nausea. She wanted a healthier solution for Ari.

Ari sulked and rebelled her first month in "fat school," but soon grew to like the activities and food offered. She hiked, played sports, got psychological counseling and learned to make low-fat versions of favorite foods. "Before, I'd lose five pounds and say, 'Whoop-de-do, it all comes back anyway,'" Ari says. "But this time I could *see* the results." Gradually, her anger at her mom and everyone else melted away with the extra weight.

So far Ari's lowest weight has been 209, but the teen, who is large-boned and muscular, hopes to reach 180—the goal set by a college softball scout she talked to. She notes everything she eats in a journal, jogs or walks daily and, for motivation, keeps a digital photo of herself at her heaviest in her MP3 player.

For her mom, though, the change in Ari's personality is even more dramatic than the one in her body. "When she got back from California, she said, 'Mom, I didn't want to say this, but *thank you*,'" Terri recalls, getting tearful. "I'm happier. I *like* myself now. I like the way I look. I like the way I feel." **CONTINUED**

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